



Kia ora Friend --

2024 has certainly carried on from where 2023 left off. It is hard not to be downcast by the growing list of retrograde and damaging decisions being taken by our government such as the (deep breath) repeal of tobacco-free legislation, removal of the clean-car discount, disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora, assaults on Te Reo Māori, threats to undo the role Te Tiriti o Waitangi plays in Aotearoa, the publication of a draft Government Position Statement on transport that wouldn't be out of place in the car-centric 1950s, and a fast-track consenting bill that gives undue power to ministerial decisions and risks undue influence from lobbyists. Like the bully stomping on a sandcastle at the beach, they've unfortunately proved that it's easier to wreck than to build.

Despite it all there are glimmers of good news happening and there are ways of making your influence heard even with a government that seems intent to ignore equity, fairness, and science. Local government long-term plans are due for updating and many councils will be consulting on these in the coming weeks- if your own is, be sure to put in even a quick submission supporting a healthy and climate-friendly plan. Much of the transport infrastructure we use on a daily basis remains under local council control and funding.

If you are in Wellington on Tuesday 19 March, please come to Parliament at 5pm to protest for Transport for Life and to stand against the government's proposed transport plans.

Our voices count. OraTaiao has been disheartened by the lack of any major vocal opposition from our various health colleges to the government's decisions as well as the ongoing humanitarian, health, and climate disaster in Palestine. This isn't the time to meekly accept that what is happening is inevitable, but to stand up even more loudly against it.

Nāku noa, nā

Dermot & Summer

Co-convenors, OraTaiao: NZ Climate & Health Council

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## 1. Update on OraTaiao activities

### Upholding Te Tiriti at Waitangi

As reported in the [November Newsletter](#), the OraTaiao Executive made a commitment at its first post-election meeting in October to “Campaign against the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora and any referendum on Te Tiriti o Waitangi.”

The risk to Te Tiriti today is greater than at any time since the passing of the Treaty of Waitangi Act in 1975. So it was natural that a group from the OraTaiao Executive – Michael Brenndorfer, Dr George Laking and Secretary Romelli Rodriguez-Jolly – travelled to Waitangi to join the popular defence on 6 February.

The record mobilisation of [60,000 people](#) in support of Te Tiriti and intersecting issues appears to have staved off the existential threat of a referendum, but the struggle for Māori health equity and indigenous climate leadership continues, so we spoke out in the media against the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora.

- [OraTaiao opposes the scrapping of Te Aka Whai Ora and urges delay of enabling legislation](#)



OraTaiao at Waitangi | Photo: Romelli Rodriguez-Jolly

## **Focusing engagement**

The same post-election meeting of the OraTaiao Executive also decided that in the new political environment, we would “focus more on networking with health professional organisations and influencing health sector leaders” and “ramp up our advocacy at the local government level.”

In line with these decisions, OraTaiao Co-convenor Dr Dermot Coffey joined a meeting last month with the Sustainability Advisory Group for Te Whatu Ora, and OraTaiao Co-convenor Summer Wright (Ngāti Maniapoto) wrote to Auckland Transport and Mayor Wayne Brown in support of safer pedestrian crossings (more on this below). They also met with He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission to discuss health sector input into the Commission’s [advice to Government for the fourth emissions budget](#), covering the period 2036–2040. Consultation on this advice will open to the public on 8 April. A CCC webinar for OraTaiao members was proposed.

- [Letter to the Mayor of Auckland on safer pedestrian crossings](#)

## **Advising on Primary Care emissions reductions**

“One of the most frequent questions arising whenever climate change and health are discussed”, writes OraTaiao Co-convenor Dr Dermot Coffey in last week’s *NZ Doctor Rata Aotearoa*, “is how to reduce emissions within our practices and clinical work.” To answer this question, he reviews the research and offers some answers to help decision-making for those who would like to improve the climate footprint of their work in Primary Care. Thanks to *NZ Doctor* for making this previously paywalled article available to all OraTaiao members. For more great content like this, subscribe [here](#).

- NZ Doctor: “[Metered-dose inhalers No.1 villain: General practice small emissions source but key influencer](#)”

## **The human right to a clean, healthy & sustainable environment**

April will see New Zealand’s human rights record come under scrutiny at the United Nations, during our fourth Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council. The Government will report on the actions it has taken to improve the human rights situations in Aotearoa and receive recommendations from other UN member states. Following the [historic vote](#) by the UN General Assembly in 2022 recognising “the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment”, scrutiny will now include actions on climate change, as well as the long-recognised right to health. OraTaiao was pleased to support an NGO stakeholder report on these matters, which was presented to UN-based diplomats in Geneva on 13 February.

- [New Zealand UPR Pre-Session, Geneva, 13 February 2024 – Combined statement](#)

### Standing for peace in Gaza

The February meeting of the OraTaiao Executive discussed our organisation's position with respect to the war on Gaza, and whether there might be any role for advocacy. A number of OraTaiao Executive members have been involved, in a personal capacity, in the activities of [Aotearoa Healthcare Workers for Palestine](#). The Executive decided to work on a statement that describes solidarity with Palestine from a climate health angle.



OraTaiao Co-convenor Summer Wright at Auckland Palestine Solidarity march | Photo: Summer Wright

## 2. National happenings

### A 100 day war on health equity and our climate

Friday, 8 March marked the end of the first hundred days in office for the coalition Government. One day earlier the Fast Track Approvals Bill, which will bypass the need for resource consents, was introduced to Parliament as part of what Aotearoa's largest environmental groups describe as a "[war on nature](#)."

The Government introduced a total of 21 bills in its first hundred days and passed 13 of them into law, including legislation to repeal smokefree legislation, to disestablish Te Aka Whai Ora with no published plan for ensuring Māori health equity, to scrap the Clean Car Discount Scheme and to [end funding](#) for up to 30 Auckland

cycleways, bus lanes, and traffic calming measures by axing the regional fuel tax. These bills were [all passed under urgency](#), which meant that they were not referred to a select committee and there was no opportunity for public input. Deprived of this opportunity, OraTaiao resorted to [a media release](#) to make our strong opposition known.

Government policy announcements have included an end to another [\\$305 million worth of transport spending](#) from the Climate Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which had been tagged for cycleways, walkable neighbourhoods and public transport which is more reliable and easier to use in 46 cities and towns across the motu. The upcoming Budget in May will stop [billions of dollars worth of other projects](#), also to be funded by the CERF, intended to support emissions reductions, reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, support te ao Māori approaches or address the distributional impacts of climate change.

The Government has also made public commitments to enable the expansion of offshore fossil fuel production and to push back plans for farmers to cover the cost of their climate pollution.

Over the last term, OraTaiao made numerous submissions to Parliamentary select committees. In the last year alone we have submitted [to Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport](#) on its draft Government Policy Statement on Land Transport. We have submitted extensively [to Manatū Mō Te Taiao](#) and [to He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission](#) on a range of matters including pricing agricultural emissions.

As well as blocking submissions to select committees, the Government has publicly [rejected official advice from Te Manatū Waka](#) and has [dumped the draft Government Policy Statement](#) we contributed to. It has signalled a clear intention to [ignore the advice on agricultural emissions](#). It has also rejected advice from [Manatū Hauora](#) on smoking, from [Te Tāhū o te Ture Ministry of Justice](#) on its draft bill to unilaterally redefine the principles of Te Tiriti, as well as advice and from [Hīkina Whakatutuki Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment](#) on the inequitable impacts of scrapping Fair Pay Agreements.

But the hundred days could have been even worse. For months, National Party leader Christopher Luxon prevaricated over support for the Treaty Principles Bill. But on 7 February, he unequivocally ruled out his party's support for the Bill beyond its first reading. Meanwhile, progress on decarbonising transport continues apace at the local level and legal challenges to the Government over health equity and climate policy are mounting. These developments provide grounds for hope and illustrate where advocacy for climate and health might now focus.

### **Back onto the streets with School Strike 4 Climate**

Christopher Luxon was "[spooked](#)" into ruling out support for the Treaty Principles Bill, according to ACT leader David Seymour, by the people power evident at Waitangi this year. This key insight into the inner workings of the Government



highlights the efficacy of popular mobilisations for winning policy gains when other avenues for public input such as submissions are closed off. It is also why OraTaiao is prioritising support for the next School Strike 4 Climate on 5 April.

15-year old SS4C spokesperson [Nate Wilbourne says](#), “Aotearoa’s climate policies are falling short, and we can’t stay silent. We have a government who cares more about profit than our whānau and the planet. On April the 5th join us on the streets, because Aotearoa is rising. Our future is at stake and we won’t back down. April the 5th, our voices united, let’s challenge our leaders and demand the action that Papatūānuku deserves. No matter where you live, or who you are, join us.”

Follow SS4CNZ on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) – or even [TikTok](#) – for updates.



Nate Wilbourne | Photo: SS4C NZ

### **Rally to support Transport for Life**

The Government's draft transport plan locks us into car dependency. Released last week, the draft Government Policy Statement on Land Transport [removes climate change](#) as a strategic priority to be addressed and downgrades funding for public and active transport. It means more traffic jams, higher costs, pollution, and more traffic deaths. But you can't build your way out of congestion. We deserve modern transport that makes it easy and affordable to get around by walking, cycling, public transport, and driving. Transport that keeps people safe, supports well being, and doesn't cost the earth.

This is why OraTaiao is supporting the [Cycling Action Network rally](#) at Parliament at 5-6 pm on Tuesday 19 March. Join us there – and bring props like children's bikes, push chairs, shoes, kick scooters, child car seats, wheelchairs, mobility devices – that symbolise who we're fighting for.

### **Green shoots sprouting in the back yard**

While central Government unleashes its assault on te taiao, local authorities are reporting success after success for climate and health.

This month, [Horizons Regional Council announced](#) that Palmerston North and Ashhurst residents are now able to ride the country's first fully electric bus network while also enjoying faster, more direct and frequent, and easier-to-understand services. [Palmerston North City Council](#) had already hit its target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent seven years ahead of schedule.

Environment Southland, Southland District Council, Invercargill City and the Gore District Council have all just [endorsed a strategy](#) to support a cohesive response against climate change and to protect environmental, economic, cultural and social wellbeing.

Dunedin City Council and Otago Regional Council have opted to work with (not against) He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission, and [have produced](#) “a shining example of people working together locally to tackle climate change.”

[Northland Regional Council](#) has committed to halving its carbon emissions by 2030, reaching net zero by 2050 and achieving climate-positive status from then on. It plans to electrify all of Whangārei's CityLink bus fleet by 2030. And [Greater Wellington Regional Council](#) reported signs of ongoing mode shift with record numbers travelling on its [increasingly electrified](#), 99 percent-plus reliable bus network.

But despite these local successes and commitments, councils will face political headwinds blowing from the Beehive this year – especially regarding [active and public transport](#). An early sign of this was an [attack by Transport Minister Simeon](#)



[Brown](#) on raised pedestrian crossings in Tāmaki Makaurau, based on faulty figures ([belatedly corrected](#)) from a headline in the *NZ Herald*.

Concerned that decisions to improve road safety and support walking and cycling might be made using inaccurate information, OraTaiao wrote to Auckland Transport and the Mayor to supply them with evidence from peer-reviewed studies. AT has [now announced](#) that the safety improvements will go ahead.

To counter these headwinds and show that people want action on climate and health, we are encouraging all members to make submissions on their local Long Term Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan (for those councils not deferring planning this year). Timeframes for selected councils which have published their consultation dates are below.

- [Bay of Plenty Regional Council Toi Moana](#) RLTP: 23 Feb – 24 March
- [Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Council](#) LTP: 28 Feb – 28 March
- [Christchurch City Council](#) LTP: 18 March – 21 April
- [Wellington City Council](#) LTP: 12 April – 12 May 2024

### **Climate and health will get their day in court**

Mike Smith, chair of the Climate Change Iwi Leaders Group, has made world headlines over the last month. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in February that Smith has the right to sue seven New Zealand-based corporate entities, including Z Energy and Channel Infrastructure, Genesis Energy, NZ Steel, BT Mining, Dairy Holdings and Fonterra, claiming they contributed to climate change.

The [landmark ruling](#) said that the companies have a case to answer for allegedly committing three forms of civil wrong or “tort” – public nuisance, negligence and a new form of civil wrong described as a “proposed climate system damage tort”. Paragraph 188 of the ruling also found that, “the trial court will need to grapple with the fact that Mr Smith purports to bring proceedings not merely as an alleged proprietor who has suffered loss, but as a kaitiaki acting on behalf of the whenua, wai and moana—distinct entities in their own right. And it must consider some tikanga conceptions of loss that are neither physical nor economic.”

Also in February, the Waitangi Tribunal announced it had granted a priority Kaupapa inquiry into the Government’s climate change policy. “The focus should, as raised by the various claims, be on the physical, spiritual, and socioeconomic impacts of climate change on Māori and the Crown’s response,” the decision said.

This inquiry will follow the Tribunal’s urgent hearing into claims that the Crown breached Te Tiriti o Waitangi by disestablishing Te Aka Whai Ora. Despite the Pae Ora (Disestablishment of Māori Health Authority) Amendment Act 2024, which OraTaiao publicly opposed, lead claimant Lady Tureiti Moxon says, “Legally this

continues to remain a live issue because the Waitangi Tribunal will inquire into the actions of the Crown following the passing of the legislation.”

- The Guardian: “[The Māori climate activist breaking legal barriers to bring corporate giants to court](#)”
- Newsroom: “[Climate hearing to explore ‘catastrophic Treaty breaches’](#)”
- NZ Herald: “[Shutting down jurisdiction of Waitangi Tribunal ‘power play’ - Tureiti Moxon](#)”



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**Waitangi Tribunal claimants say Crown move not the end**

Tribunal litigant claims Crown has pulled a 'power play' on Māori health.

WAI3307 claimant Lady Moxon | Image [Te Kōhao Health](#)

### 3. International news

#### **Earth's hottest recorded year – 1.5 degrees breached**

Previously estimated and predicted, data released last month by the EU's climate service finally confirmed that the global average temperature in 2023 was 1.5°C hotter than pre-industrial levels.

The 1.5°C threshold matters politically because it is the level New Zealand and other signatories to the Paris Agreement are aiming to stay within, but there is no “magic number.” Every fraction of a degree hotter has an impact.

Worryingly, the start of 2024 has smashed more temperature records. Last month was the hottest February ever recorded – 1.77°C hotter than February temperatures in pre-industrial times. It was the ninth successive monthly temperature record.

NIWA forecaster Tristan Meyers explained to RNZ that a 1.5°C rise is not like taking a gentle 21°C degree summer's day and turning it up to 22.5°C. “What we're really measuring is the amount of energy and heat that is stuck in the atmosphere. Think

about the oceans. The oceans are enormous and we're heating up the oceans and it's causing a lot of things to destabilise.”

With leaders of wealthy, high-emitting nations doubling down on inaction and more far right figures poised to win elections, the stark choice faced by humanity may be to destabilise the climate, or destabilise these political elites.

- RNZ: [“Humanity marks first year under a 1.5C rise - EU climate service”](#)
- New Scientist: [“The world just experienced the hottest February on record”](#)

### **The Gaza genocide is an ecocide too**

A death toll of 30,000 and rising. One in 20 of the entire population killed or injured. Children dying of malnutrition as starvation is deployed as a weapon of war. A finding by the International Court of Justice of “plausible” acts of genocide in Gaza.

Israel’s ongoing slaughter of Palestinian people is a stain upon the world, leading to erosion of political and civil rights in countries far from the fighting, undermining the framework of international law – and damaging our global ecosystem.

[Research published](#) in January in the *Social Science Research Network* journal found that direct carbon emissions from the first 60 days of military activity were greater than the annual emissions of 20 individual countries and territories. Including emissions from US military flights delivering weapons to Israel, the carbon footprint doubles. When the assessment scope includes the future reconstruction of Gaza, the carbon emissions resulting from the first 60 days of war are equivalent to the entire annual emissions of New Zealand.

The ecological effects of the war will be felt long after the shooting stops – not least in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which are among the most vulnerable in the world to the effects of climate change.

Hadeel Ikhmais, head of the climate change section within the Palestinian Environment Quality Authority, says, “Among all the problems facing the state of Palestine in the coming decades, climate change is the most immediate and certain, and this has been amplified by the occupation and war on Gaza since since the 7th of October.”

She writes, “The climate change impacts that affect Palestine include decreased precipitation, significant warming, more frequent extreme weather events, and a rise in the sea level.”

“Specifically, the impacts on the agricultural sector will include more frequent droughts and increased desertification, changes in the economic viability of crops, increased water requirements for crops, a decline in grazing ranges and livestock, and higher food prices. For the water sector, climate change will exacerbate the effects of Israel’s current control on regional water sources. In addition, there is a

grave concern over the potential impact of climate change through decreased precipitation and sea-level rise on the coastal aquifer in Gaza.”

Patrick Bigger, co-author of the *Social Science Research Network* report, says that, “Carbon emissions are not the most important reason to be demanding an immediate, permanent, durable, just ceasefire, but they are another reason.”

As mentioned above, the OraTaiao Executive decided at its February meeting to work on a statement that describes solidarity with Palestine from a climate health angle.

- Al Jazeera: “[The climate cost of Israel's war on Gaza](#)”
- Democracy Now: “[Gaza War Fuels Climate Crisis: “Massive” Carbon Emissions from Israeli Bombing](#)”
- This Week in Palestine: “[Climate Change in Palestine](#)”



Hadeel Ikhmais represents the State of Palestine at COP28, as war rages | Photo: AP/Joshua A. Bickel

#### 4. Good news, interesting links, books

##### **‘Monsters on wheels’ to finally start paying for their impacts**

At OraTaiao, we love the French – and not just for their food and their willingness to protest for their rights. In a rare snippet of good news, Parisians voted in a referendum last month to triple the parking fees for SUVs entering the city. Out-of-

town drivers will now pay NZ\$32 per hour to park these vehicles – or NZ\$400 for a six-hour stay.

Tony Renucci, director of the air quality campaign group Respire, said: “The result of the vote is a victory for Paris residents’ quality of life.” He added that Paris was sending a message that “the presence of these monsters on wheels was no longer desirable on our streets.”

Thank you, Newshub, for suggesting the same thing for our capital.

- Newshub: “[After Paris votes in favour of higher SUV parking charges, some Wellingtonians say they'd support it for their city](#)”

This newsletter was written by Grant Brookes.

OraTaiao: New Zealand Climate and Health Council

<https://www.orataiao.org.nz/>

OraTaiao: New Zealand Climate and Health Council comprises health professionals in Aotearoa/New Zealand calling for urgent and fair climate action - with real health gains now and for our future.